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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

The change which has come over the military situation this month has brought victory nearer. Victory will lay on us overwhelming tasks. They will demand qualities of a different and rarer order than those which have sustained the nation through the years of struggle and defeat. There is as yet little evidence that there is among us the spiritual understanding and strength which will be needed to carry the colossal responsibilities that will rest on us.

THE POWER OF SILENT GROWTH

Far more important for the future than many of the events which fill the headlines and than many ambitious plans are the secret shoots of new spiritual life in the lives of individuals.[1] Where may we look for these regenerative influences ? I believe that they are silently coming into existence and slowly gathering strength in small groups that are seeking in common to discover the true values of life and, through self-discipline and mutual support and criticism, to embody them in their lives. These hidden movements of the Spirit do not lend themselves to record. But as pointers to what I mean I will quote from two documents that have recently come into my hands. One is a statement by a small group, some of the members of which are living together in the same house :—

" We have realized with humble gratefulness that God has been with us very truly even as far as we have gone. We have not found our relationships with each other easy, all we can say is that we have refused to be defeated over them. We have found out very painfully that peace in personal relationships is not a finished static thing, but that it is a ' constructive conflict,' refusing defeat at that point where the impossible impasse causes us, or would cause us, to sink back into the bog of defeat. Here is the point where we have come to believe a soul really meets Christ in a new and victorious way. We have come to see that Christ did not die to help us to do the possible in a better way only, but to do the impossible. The Cross is still, to too many Christians, a foolishness and stumbling block wherever it is applied to the mundane relationships of every day. It is easier to bear and suffer the sin of another than it is to be loving enough to redeem and save the situation existing between, with all its subtle and unpleasant consequences to pride and feeling. It is this frustration point that we seek to learn how to pass. We believe, with God, we shall find it.

" To know more of the way and will of God demands an activity of spirit and will. In a group we can learn more quickly, and more firmly concentrate on the challenge :—

(*a*) To die to ourselves, our self-importances and prides which are fed in our jobs. We are all in our way successful people there. We cannot self-consciously work for humility, but we know we must base our life upon it, and we can refuse to be bound by the things of pride, whether in ourselves or in each other. As we are faithful to that fight we believe humility will be given.

[1] The difference between what meets the outward eye and the reality which ultimately matters has perhaps never been set forth more powerfully than in J. B. Mozley's great sermon on " The Reversal of Human Judgment," included in Bishop Hensley Henson's *Selected English Sermons*. (The World's Classics, Oxford University Press. 3s.)

(*b*) Help each other to realize our blindnesses.

(*c*) In reverence for God, and each other, find a corporate judgment.

(*d*) Keep a point of sanity in a distracted world when its impact is unbearable if faced alone.

(*e*) Be saved from the sin of self-sufficiency."

The second quotation is from a privately circulated document containing notes of addresses at a small conference of those seeking the same ends.

"This time in which we are living is marked by a deep, underlying movement of the Spirit, drawing man into unity. This is shown in two ways: the first is the bringing of actual life, piece by piece, through deliberate choice, within the spiritual purpose, so that that purpose can act upon it, can transmute it and fulfil it. This is only done through man's freewill, exercised in love. It is a series of definite acts, focussed differently according to the individuals or groups concerned. It has no set rule: what is right for one group may be wrong for another. Its principle is the offering of some actual bit of life for the ultimate purpose of God, without conditions. The result of this is that a change of values takes place within the being of those concerned. I can only describe it as moving into the real. This change prepares us for the new life.

"The second half of this movement is that the life of the Spirit (up till now enshrined in tradition) appears in new ways and forms which we are obliged to recognize in ordinary life. This is shown, for instance, in the principle of a common sharing of material possessions, in the urge towards community (the social expression of unity), in the fact that religion and life (two ideas which have become separated) are drawing together again.

"There is great need now of little groups in which this movement of the Spirit can take place freely, and in which the new values can grow. They cannot grow freely in an official institution. They have mutual trust, which is the basis of society, and their mark is the sense of wholeness."

THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of this week's Supplement is a lay brother of the Society of the Sacred Mission and lectures in literature and history at Kelham. He is the author of a volume on *Christian Discrimination* in the C.N-L. series,[1] and of many contributions in literary and theological journals on subjects on the borderland between theology and literary history and criticism.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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